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A Glimpse of the History of Woman Suffrage

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— OF —

WOMAN SUFFRAGE.

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WOMAN SUFFRAGE.

Events which turn the thoughts of some of the best minds, and the efforts of some of the bravest hearts into new channels, and which are the precursors of a grander, brighter era, are worthy of renewed, and oft recurring attention.

Indeed, the most interesting spectacles ever presented for our contemplation in human history, are those which set before us the struggles of mankind for *larger* liberty.

And, strange as it may seem at first sight, they are the most hopeless in their beginnings, and the most difficult in their acheivement. Hopeless, save to those who have faith in the power of right, and in its final victory; difficult, because tradition and custom become a kind of second nature.

In the on-going of time what eventually may be admitted by all right thinking people to be monstrous wrongs, were, before they were revealed in their true character, looked upon as sacred—ordained of heaven, and not to be disturbed.

Even human slavery was so regarded; and so it may be said has the past limited, and almost subject condition of *woman* been considered, and is largely so even to-day.

The most despotic governments of the past were ruled over, it was held, by Kings who could do no wrong. For hundreds of years such doctrine was hardly questioned. That the people could govern themselves was considered the wildest political heresy. But the struggle of seventy-six demonstrated to the world that the people *were* equal to self-government, that enlarged rights ennobled, strengthened and made grander the character of those who possessed and exercised them.

And in the result of the conflict between the North and the South is being developed the same fact, that liberty, freedom,—the exercise of the inherent rights of manhood develop and make stronger and truer that manhood.

Thus in the contest now being waged by the disfranchised sex we may hope, with a like victory, there may be a like uplifting, enlarging and ennobling of woman's nature. As a philosopher once said that he would rather *seek after* truth, than to possess it, so perhaps the struggles after liberty and rights are not altogether to be deplored. They are a great dicipline, and the women who to-day are laboring for the possession of the ballot and consequent enlarged duties, are being educated concerning the laws and politics of the country in a manner to exercise them wisely when obtained, not only for their own

better protection, but for the more full and harmonious development of the sex, and the consequent improvement of the *whole* human race.

It hardly need be said perhaps that previous to the more modern introduction of the subject under consideration, that woman had not been a mere cypher,—a drone in the hive of the industrial and intellectual world.

Although everywhere, the caste of sex existed, "creating diverse codes of morals for man and woman, diverse penalties for crime, diverse industries, diverse educational rights, and diverse relations to government," still woman's power and influence were made manifest and acknowledged in all the walks of life. Queens had sat upon thrones of great nations and shown wisdom and ability in governing and strengthening their Kingdoms equal to their rivals of the opposite sex. "Even before the Christian era, one Martia held the reins of government so wisely as to receive the surname of *Proba,* the just. She especially devoted herself to the enactment of just laws, the first principles of the common law it is said, having been traced to her."

We may learn as from no other source, in the very full and able history, edited and published by Mrs. Stanton and Miss Anthony, the full scope of woman's powers—her grand achievements in the past, notwithstanding her circumscribed condition, and the still larger promise of an untrammelled future if her wise and persistent efforts of to-day are successful.

To this history I am indebted for some of the striking facts, and stirring interesting incidents given in this paper.

We find that the women of our country during the Revolution worked bravely, nobly and self-sacrificingly as well as the men of that day, yet they have hardly received their full meed of recognition in the political histories which have come down to us. The home of Mrs. Otis Warren was the headquarters of the Rebellion. "She it was who first based the struggle upon inherent rights," asserting that "inherent rights" belonged to all mankind—had been conferred on all by the "God of Nations." The phrase has since been used by all who have labored for individual freedom, until it has become the "corner-stone of political authority."

Abagail Smith Adams -wife of John Adams, was another noted woman during the early struggle of our country. She protested strongly against the formation of the new government without woman having a voice in its representation, and in that day of rebellion against kingly authority, she asserted there should be a rebellion of women against men unless the rights of her sex were secured. She was even more emphatic in her charges and demands than the women of to-day.

She wrote her husband in March '76, then in Continental Congress: "Do not put such unlimited power in the hands of husbands. Remember all men would be tyrants if they could." And still further she says —"If particular care and attention are not paid to the women, we will not hold ourselves bound to obey any laws in which we have no voice or representation."

She recognized the importance of education as the basis of all sound, enlightened government, and earnestly urged that the constitution about to be formed should distinguish itself for its encourage-

ment of intelligence and virtue, and that institutions of learning be made available to both sexes, saying: "If we mean to have heroes, statesmen and philosophers, we should have learned women."

We learn from history, that although the first plat of ground set apart in the United States for a public school was given by a woman—Bridget Graffert, in 1700 ; yet the ungracious or disgraceful fact is also recorded, that "her sex was denied admission to it." And how many, many years was the sex denied admission into any of the higher schools, forbidden all entrance into a knowledge of the professions, and is even now refused a place in most of the Colleges of the land! But notwithstanding the many limitations which environed women she labored nobly and unceasingly in helping to secure the cause of liberty, and found all the grand institutions which bless our country. It was woman's loyalty and wisdom which aided greatly in achieving victory at the first naval battle of the Revolution. It was fought at Machias, Maine. All the men of the surrounding country engaged in it, arming themselves with scythes, pitchforks, and any implement at hand on account of scarcity of powder. At a settlement twenty miles distant a quantity of powder was discovered after all the men had left, save the old and feeble, and boys too young to be of any service.

In this emergency the heroism of two young women was grandly exhibited, "Hannah and Rebecca Weston volunteered to make the attempt of carrying the powder to the place of battle. The way led through a trackless forest—the route merely indicated by blazed trees. Bears, wolves and wild-cats were numerous, and the distance so great it was impossible to traverse it in a day, so the night must be spent in the dreary wilderness which was infested by the wild Indian who might capture or kill them.

But undauntedly these young women set out on their journey carrying twenty pounds of powder, and reached Machias in safety, "and in time for their precious burden to be used in aid of the victory which was won by the Colonists."

How much greater heroism, I wonder, was displayed by our brave boys in blue during our last war, than by these courageous young women in those wild pioneer days!

It was a woman who sent Paul Revere on his famous ride from Boston to Concord on the night of April 18, 1775, bearing the fate of the nation in the warning signal of the expected invasion with the rising of the morrow's sun. The women of Boston it was who formed the first Anti-Tea-League, three hundred of them pledging themselves to use no more tea until the tax was removed.

This sacrifice was made by them five years before the historic Tea-party was resolved upon, when "men disguised as Indians threw the East India Company's tea over-board, and six years before the declaration of war."

The sympathy and active interest of woman in all efforts to secure freedom and independence to this new country—her education in the stern labors and duties of life in primitive homes and surroundings, gave her self-reliance, and cultivated a strong individualism in thought and action, and fostered a love of personal liberty which enlisted her energies in behalf of the oppressed everywhere, which worked on and on with an ever-increasing influence.

Large-minded, warm-hearted women of other countries were also at work in the cause of liberty, and some soon learned that in America they could find fuller scope for their powers, and here came Frances Wright, and Ernestine L. Rose and others.

They with some of the more intelligent and thinking here, early espoused the cause of the slave,—even in the very introduction of the Anti-slavery agitation, and the names of Abbey Kelly Foster, the Grimki sisters, Sarah Pugh, Lucretia Mott and too many others to be mentioned, will go down to posterity by the side of Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips and others, as brave workers in the cause of humanity. While thus engaged they were incidentally if not ostensibly opening the way for larger liberty for themselves. It was at the "World's Anti-Slavery Convention," held in London, June 12, 1840, that the thought of a "*Woman's Rights Convention*" was conceived, as slavery of *sex* was as fully demonstrated there, as was patent the fact that the negro of the South was a chattel.

The call of the convention was to all anti-slavery organizations, and several women delegates were sent from this country. Johnny Bull had never dreamed of such effrontery, and great was his consternation when he learned that several very noted women—those who had actually faced mobs—been ridiculed by the press and the people, and who had been loudly denounced by many pulpits, were really on their way to England! It was said that the excitement and vehemence of protest could not have been greater had news been received that the country was about to be invaded by the French! The portentous day finally arrived, and on a beautiful morning in June the delegates from various countries were gathered in Free Mason's Hall. There was much private consultation in the vestibule concerning the manner in which the women delegates were to be disposed of, and when the convention was finally opened one of the most noted battles ever fought, for and against the tyranny of sex was developed. Wendell Phillips eloquently defended the admission of the women as delegates, while many noted Englishmen disclaimed their right there *as such*, as the thought of women representatives was not in contemplation when the call was made. Reverend gentlemen appealed to them to so far conform to English prejudices and customs and the "ordinance of Almighty God" as to withdraw their credentials, thought it better the convention should be dissolved at *once*, rather than that the resolution admitting them as delegates should prevail.

Lucretia Mott, in her firm, calm manner asserted that the delegates had no discretionary power—the responsibility of rejecting or accepting them must rest with the convention. After a long and very excited discussion, the majority, as was to be supposed, could not overcome education and predjudice, and the zealous workers who had gone three thousand miles as representatives in the cause of humanity were rejected, and thus insultingly told that "women formed no part of the constitutional elements of the moral world."

This rebuff, however—this world-wide advertisement of the power and tyranny of prejudice over all rights—love of humanity even, did not fail of its larger work; it had a deeper vitality, a more lasting effect than the convention *itself*. It was there that the thought of Woman's Rights was individualized—*distinctively* had *birth*. Lucretia Mott and

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the evening of the first day of the convention, when reviewing the exciting scenes of the morning, resolved on their return to America to hold a Woman's Rights Convention! They had had new evidences of the great need of a more extended education on that subject—of the necessity of a bolder stand in self-defense, and the express work for the enfranchisement of woman was then and there inaugurated.

It was not, however, until July, 1848, that a convention for that purpose was called to meet at Seneca Falls, N. Y., the 19th and 20th of that month.

Those who called the meeting, and indeed few if any women of that day had had any experience in organizing conventions, framing resolutions, etc., and they found themselves as Mrs. Stanton says, quite innocent of the herculean labors proposed, and the humiliating fact must be recorded that before taking the initiative step, they faithfully perused various *masculine* productions. "But all seemed too tame and pacific for the inauguration of a rebellion, such as the world had never before seen." James Mott, lover of freedom, and in deep sympathy with the leaders in this movement, in his quaint Quaker costume, was called on to preside at this first convention. Lucretia, his wife, stated the object of the meeting, and in a brief cursory review the condition of women throughout the world, and showed the importance of the step being taken, and expressed the hope it might open the way whereby they might obtain a truer knowledge of themselves and their needs, and apply the means necessary for their elevation.

Several able, well-considered addresses were read by ladies present, one as a matter of course being given by Mrs. Stanton.

A brief of their declaration of sentiments is as follows:

"Equal rights for women in the universities, and in the trades and professions; the right to vote, to share in all political offices, honors and emoluments; to complete equality in marriage, to personal freedom, property, wages and *children;* to make contracts; to sue and be sued, and to testify in courts of justice—married women being at *that* time under the common law, in nearly as degraded a condition as the slaves of the South."

The proceedings of this convention were quite generally published, and created a great deal of comment, interspersed with more or less of ridicule, as well as being greatly denounced by some of the more conservative. But the spark ignited there has grown to a brilliant blaze which sheds a cheering light all over the land, and reaches even to other countries. The enthusiasts found the time of the first convention *too* limited, and they adjourned to meet again in two weeks in Rochester. There, some of the bolder ones proposed to have a woman preside! but the influence of custom still held so strong a rein over even Mrs. Mott and Mrs. Stanton that they thought it a "hazardous experiment," and strongly opposed it; but they were outvoted, and the lady (Abigail Bush,) who assumed the duties discharged them in such an admirable manner that the opposition soon became reconciled to the "seemingly ridiculous experiment!"

It is only by contrasting the positions, offices of note and importance, accorded to, and well filled, by the women of to-day, that we can

realize the wonderful change and progress achieved for her, and by her, since the first movements made for the enlargement of her career and usefulness, at the conventions we have just been noting.

Indeed the most rapid strides were made by the very women of the conventions at that time, in self-confidence, knowledge of parliamentary rules and the necessary tactics brought into exercise in controlling large assemblies ; for at the next convention—the first one held in Ohio, it was officered entirely by women, not a man being allowed to sit on the platform, to speak, or to vote ! If one arose *meekly* to offer a suggestion even, he was ruled out of order. One present says: "*Never did men so suffer.*" "They then learned for the first time in the world's history how it felt to sit in silence when questions in which they were interested were being discussed."

One of the most notable occurrences at a convention held shortly after at Akron in this state. and presided over by Frances Gage, was the presence and speech of one of the wisest, grandest characters of the day, though only a poor uneducated ex-slave, Sojourner Truth !

The women then engaged in the work were subject to so much criticism and aspersion, that the more timid dreaded any unusual appearance or development, knowing it would only add more obloquy to the infant cause, and many besought the president not to allow old Sojourner to speak.

The afternoon of the second day several clergymen of the town were present and took part in the discussion. "One, claiming superior rights and privileges for man, on the ground of superior intellect ; another, because of the manhood of Christ ; another, gave a theological view of the sin of our first mother." There were few women accustomed to "speaking in meeting" in those days and the ministers seemed to be getting the better of them, and those not in sympathy were greatly enjoying the discomfiture as they supposed, of the "strong-minded" when slowly arose Sojourner and solemnly moved to the front, laid her old sun-bonnet at her feet, and lifted her "great speaking eyes to the president." There were sounds and looks of disapprobation all around but the president announced, Sojourner Truth ! and asked for silence. All eyes were turned upon the tall dark figure, her head erect, covered with a white turban, and "her eyes," as the writer says, "piercing the upper air like one in a dream." At her first word there was a profound hush. She said :

"Wall, chilern, whar dar is so much racket dar *must* be somethin' out o' kilter. But what's all dis here talkin' 'bout? Dat man ober dar say dat womin needs to be helped into carriages, and lifted ober ditches and to hab de best place everywhar. Nobody eber helps me into carriages or ober mud puddles, or gibs *me* any best place ! " And raising herself to her full height and her voice to a high pitch she asked, "and ain't *I* a woman? Look at me! look at my arm! [and she bared her right arm to the shoulder, showing her tremendous muscular power.] I have plowed and planted and gathered into barns, and no man could head me ! and ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man,—when I could get it,—and bear de lash as well ! and ain't I a woman ? I have borne *thirteen* chilern and seen 'em mos' all sold off to slavery and when I cried out with my mother's grief none but Jesus heard me !

and ain't I a woman? Den dey talks 'bout dis ting in de head—what dis dey call it ? [" Intellect," whispered some one.] Dat's it, honey. What's dat got to do wid wimmin's rights or nigger's rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint, and your'n holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half-measure full ? And she pointed her significant finger, and sent a keen glance at the minister who had made the argument about man's superior intellect, when great cheering greeted her. "Den dat little man in black dar, he say, women can't have so much rights as men 'cause *Christ* wan't a *woman !* Whar did your Christ *come from?* The writer says rolling thunder could not have stilled that crowd as did those deep wonderful words as she stood there with outstretched arms and eyes of fire. Raising her voice still louder, she repeated, "Whar did your *Christ come from?* From *God* and a *womam ! Man* had nothing to do *with* Him !" Turning to another objector, she took up the defense of Mother Eve. Will onlv give the conclusion. "If de fust woman God ever made was strong enough to turn de world upside down all alone, *all* de womin togedder ought to be able to turn it *back*, and get it right side up again! And now dey is asking to do it, de men better let 'em."

The author says, amid roars of applause, she returned to the corner where she had sat all during the convention, leaving many with streaming eyes, and hearts beating with gratitute. She had taken us up in her strong arms, and carried us safely over the slough of difficulty, turning the whole tide in our favor.

The condition of women and their efforts for the public good, now, and in 1853, is strikingly contrasted in their labors in the temperance cause. *Now* she is everywhere at work, speaking petitioning, and going even to the polls sometimes and pleading with men, if she may do no more, to cast their votes for prohibition, or on the side of temperance.

In '53 Antotnette L. Brown having been appointed a delegate to a "World's Temperance Convention" held in New York City, and having presented her credentials as such, and the president having accepted them, stood for three hours trying to express her thanks for woman's recognition, and her sympathy in the cause, but the convention would not allow her to speak *because* she was a woman.

Never was there greater confusion, dissention, or more unworthy subterfuge resorted to.

Lloyd Garrison who was present said: "I have seen many tumultuous meetings in my day, but I think on no occasion have I ever seen anything more disgraceful to our common humanity than when Miss Brown attempted to speak upon the platform of the "World's Temperance Convention in aid of the glorious cause which had brought that convention together." Miss Brown was requested by some of the more moderate to withdraw from the meeting, but she said a *principle* was at stake, and she could not then yield, unless forced to by the convention. Calmly and in a most dignified manner she endured the contempt and insulting cries of the shameless disgraceful part of the meeting, until they finally gained their point and she was obliged, *unheard*, to withdraw from the presence of the *in*-temperate passions of the World's *Temperance* Convention ! !

It was a similar feeling which prompted a very significant and heroic act, by brave Susan B. Anthony, at the opening of the Centennial Exposition, July 4th, 1876.

She, with other leaders in the cause of Woman Suffrage, felt, that the *past* century of our nations independence, although proclaiming largest liberty to all of every clime, had yet denied the same to woman, especially the application of the law of the mutual relation of taxation and representation, and they wanted to protest against the great wrong done them, and offer to the world before the representatives of the nations there assembled in honor of the great day, a *new* Declaration of Rights, and that in behalf of woman. They had requested permission of General Hawley, President of Commissioners of the Exposition, the privilege of silently handing in their document, that it might be a part of the history of the days proceedings, but he refused it, saying: "If granted, it would be the event of the day, the topic of discussion to the exclusion of all others: we cannot grant it." Nothing daunted, however, these indefatigable workers were determined that their daughters of *1976!* should know that their mothers had at the first Centennial anniversary of the Nation's life, asserted their demands for equality of rights, and impeached the government for its injustice toward them. And during the reading of the Declaration of 1776! Miss Anthony, the Napoleon of the war for Woman's Rights, as she has most appropriately been called, leading, and three or four others following, pressed their way through the crowd, and at its conclusion, she, in a few fitting words "presented the *second*—the *Women's* Declaration of Rights. Acting Vice President Ferry, with pale face, and compressed lips, bowed low, and as he was *obliged* to, politely accepted it!" But the intrepid feat was accomplished, a deeply felt duty had been performed, and the consequent triumphant feeling was greatly enjoyed by those grand heroines of the day, and will be proudly remembered of them, by their sympathizers ever after.

They with other brave women had not shown less devoted patriotism, nor less willingness to labor, suffer and sacrifice to maintain the Nation's life in the *last* war, than did the women of the Revolution, nor less than the husbands, sons and fathers who "went to the front." Double tasks were cheerfully performed at home, and great efficiency developed in organizing and supervising the sanitary department, with tender care and watchfulness in the hospital and on the field of battle; and *some* even were found clad in soldier's garb, facing all the dangers and hardships of the open conflict. I have been surprised at the number of the latter recorded in Mrs. Stanton and Miss Anthony's history. It is stated there also, that credit should be given to Anna Ella Carroll, for planning one of the most strategic and successful campaigns of the last war, indeed *the* one which unlocked the gateway which led to the downfall of the rebellion.

Woman have been willing in the past to work in mental and material ways, not to gratify any vain ambition, nor to receive any great reward, and not even to have the satisfaction of a quiet recognition of their worthy, successful efforts; and their retiring, self-abnegating nature, largely predominates to-day; but they are learning more and more in their larger experience, that there is a truth in the old maxim—"make

yourself a sheep and the wolf will eat you," and are exhibiting more self-cofidence ; more self-assertion and stronger demands for justice, well knowing it is better for *humanity*; as, the exercise of injustice in any direction re-acts upon the source from whence it comes.

The field in which woman may exercise her powers is continually and rapidly enlarging, and competency stands ready to meet it. Mary Livermore has recently stated that there are now two hundred and twenty-two occupations open to her as against *seven* at the beginning of the century.

Reform in relation to woman has truly been at work in our government, and the world at large, yet we can but feel how much more is still needed, when we think of the difference in compensation for equally well performed labor, and other discriminations against her, and especially as we remember that there is still a law in nearly all the States which gives the husband the right to will away even the unborn child (or its guardianship), and the poor mother who has gone down to the grave in her Gethsemane, is utterly helpless before it! She may raise her voice in pleading wails against the infamous wrong, but she has no right nor power to do more.

How any mother can quietly, unremonstratingly live under the bare possibility even, (it is not probable that such power would often be put in exercise) of such cruel injustice is almost inconceivable. If the men of to-day are in thought and life superior to the laws, as I believe they are to many of them, the fact that *they* having sole power, still retain such a law on the books, shows that they can be unjust to *themselves*.

But it comes with ill grace perhaps, for women to censure too much the inaction of men in righting the statute wrongs against women, when the majority of women themselves are so indifferent to their condition, float along so undisturbedly on the sentiment that they "have *a l* the *rights they want!*" The very *fact* that the great wrongs of the past have *prevented* women from being liberty loving, and *desiring* or *demanding* equal rights, is one of the strongest allegations that can be brought against those wrongs, and one of the reasons that should be used *for* the change rather than against it. It is truly one of the greatest stumbling-blocks in the way of their enfranchisement,—the more intelligent, just-minded men,—even those not fully converted to the sentiment, saying, when the *majority* of women *want* the ballot, they will have it. This, however, is like leaving to the mass of the uneducated, inexperienced and indifferent, the making of the laws which shall govern the country; whereas, it is the enlightened few (men of course) the trained minds and advanced thinkers who make the laws which govern the *masses*. Let the same rule hold concerning *women*. and the leading capable ones will not fail to effect the changes necessary to the meting out of larger justice to the sex.

But although they have not yet attained to a *voice* in legislation, their labors in relation to it are not without avail. I am happy to note the fact that a law most favorable to women in regard to property rights—one which puts the *husband* and *wife* on an equality in that respect, has been passed by the Legislature of Ohio during its last session, and all suffragists rejoice at this, as they are only laboring for the same

recognition before the law, not for generosity nor for better protection, such as has been granted them in some respects, but simply an *equality of rights!*

And the fact that the women of struggling Kansas have at last taken the first step on the grand highway toward entire freedom and equality is another source of rejoicing to all suffragists.

The perversion of the opposition press has endeavored to falsify somewhat concerning the conduct and influence of the women at the polls, but the testimony of those on the ground is, that instead of women being degraded by visiting what should be considered the freeman's sanctuary, her presence there was the signal for unusual orderly conduct, and generally, only respect and polite consideration were accorded her.

Although advance is being made "all along the lines," it sometimes seems *too slow*, and there are many times rebuffs, and seeming losses in ground already gained, but we may hope these retardations are losses only as the backward steps of the sturdy athlete for a farther forward leap!

The amount of labor performed by the courageous leaders in this great reform in the way of writing, publishing papers, pamphlets and books, in traveling all over the land making speeches, getting up monster petitions year after year and presenting them to Legislatures and Congress, addressing committees, and pleading before lawyers, judges, etc., is most astonishing to those who have made themselves familiar with it by the history I have mentioned. Grand results of their efforts are being realized in the modification of laws, the extension of liberties, in better opportunities for education and entrance into the professions and into larger fields of action and usefulness in all directions.

The great principle of evolution is visibly at work, and as it is an established fact that "Revolutions never go backward" the zealous friends of woman's enfranchisement may still keep on hoping and working. And they *are* still working, and *will* work in the faith that, if "The mills of the gods grind slow, they grind exceeding fine!" and the wheels are revolving which will bring in the *full* day already dawning, when the rights for which they have so nobly battled will *finally be won.*